

SUEZ AND THE WESTERN POWERS

Where Will Nasser Stop?

GEORGE LICHTHEIM

WHEN an international crisis bursts upon the world, one of the things it does is to set earlier events in better perspective. Since July this has been true of the East-West struggle for control of Egypt and the Suez Canal. In the light of the long-term issues raised by this conflict, Colonel Nasser's rash defiance of the maritime nations takes on the appearance of a dramatic coup designed to give Egypt the maximum leverage in a situation where East and West alike are bidding for the support of Arab nationalism. Events had been shaping in this way for some time, and we ought not to have been surprised, but it is a rule of experience that the immediate past only begins to be properly understood when a new plateau has been reached whence it can be viewed afresh.

It was thus with Hitler's and Mussolini's exploits during the 30's, when what at first looked like isolated actions gradually began to form a pattern. In retrospect, it seems astonishing how long it took the world to draw the obvious conclusion, but at the time nothing seemed less likely than that two medium-sized European countries would plunge the whole globe into war. They could not of course have done so had they not been able to exploit underlying trends making for international anarchy. It does no harm to bear this comparison in mind, and not only for the sake of the obvious and,

by now, somewhat hackneyed argument that the Western powers ought not to repeat the mistakes they made twenty years ago. There can in any case be no exact repetition of that earlier experience, if only because, even in relation to the rest of the Middle East, Egypt does not occupy the commanding position held by Germany in Central Europe during the 30's. The reason why it is nonetheless useful to evoke the parallel is that we have no other yardstick for measuring the reactions of the powers to the Suez crisis. It has been remarked by puzzled observers that of these powers, Russia seems to be the only one that is not afraid of Egypt. But even the Russians must move warily if they are to keep the support of Arab nationalism.

From the viewpoint of the Arab nationalists, this conflict gives the Middle Eastern countries, grouped around Egypt, exactly the kind of central position that Germany for a while was able to exploit. Tactically, Nasser is doing what Hitler did before him, and this (rather than the somewhat far-fetched comparisons with the much more potent Axis threat that have suddenly become the fashion in diplomatic quarters and among British and French writers) is the justification for treating his challenge as a sequel to the European upheaval twenty years ago. It can indeed be demonstrated that the Nasser regime is not fully fascist—if only because Egypt is too backward for a genuinely modern totalitarianism to take root; what cannot be so easily dismissed is the likelihood that the regime will pursue a course calculated to plunge the Middle East into war.

The probability of such an outcome has now at last been realized by the British government, which for years had tried to appease the Egyptian dictator in the hope of

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confining his ambition to less dangerous projects. Illumination has, however, come under particularly unfavorable circumstances, with France handicapped by the Algerian struggle and the United States plainly inclined to prolong Nasser's stay in power, at the cost to the Egyptian dictator of some not very far-reaching concessions in the domain of international management (or merely supervision) of the Suez Canal. In consequence, there is a danger that Nasser will not merely get away with it, but secure the kind of spectacular triumph that will embolden him to push his campaign a stage further. As the *London Times* correctly observed, "Nasser is poisoning the relations of the West with the Arab world." It might have added that he has successfully done so for years, not least because his outrageous pretense of having to defend the Arab world against Israel was indirectly sanctioned by constant Western babble about the need to "settle" this supposedly all-important obstacle to "better relations."

IT is only now, with the facts staring them in the face, that the British government and its supporters have abandoned this nonsense and allowed their true fears to become vocal. In the process they have, however, failed to rally the British public—let alone the Commonwealth—behind them. The switch has been too abrupt, and the brief period of Conservative saber-rattling at the beginning of August (which failed to frighten the Egyptians) thus had a thoroughly unnerving effect on Liberal and Labor circles, to say nothing of public opinion in India, Ceylon, and the uncommitted countries of the Middle East. It is indeed one of the major ironies of the situation that Nasser, having seized the assets of the Suez Canal Company by force and taken illegal possession of an international waterway, has been able to pose as the victim of Anglo-French bellicosity, while the British government has had to apologize to the world, including its own public at home, for daring to take some precautionary military measures.

At the time of writing, no one can say

whether and how the Egyptian government will finally be enabled to extend its physical possession of the Suez Canal to effective control of its management, coupled with some financial arrangement giving it the lion's share of all future income from shipping dues. Such an arrangement appeared probable to most observers from the moment it became clear that Britain and France lacked the nerve to impose an alternative solution. With the United States and the USSR looming behind the immediate contestants in the role of watchful guardians of their allies' interests, the role of unofficial mediator was bound to fall to India, which in the circumstances could only mean that Egypt would obtain just enough Asian backing to nullify any serious threat of intervention. In effect, therefore, the conference held in London at the end of August had to settle one point only: the size of the economic bribe that would induce Nasser to consent to some kind of international supervision. The discrepancy between this outcome and the inordinate hopes, fears, and expectations aroused by the Eden government's brief display of energy in late July and early August has been sufficiently pronounced to drive a good many people—not only Conservatives—to something near despair. But it is the kind of outcome that cooler heads had predicted from the start. Given the state of Asian opinion, which invests any military action against Egypt with the heaviest political risks, it was inevitable that Britain and France should back down—so far as military intervention was concerned. Economic sanctions are another matter.

This, however, is not to say that by backing down they have saved the essentials of the Western position in the Middle East and aligned themselves once more with the main current of public opinion in Asia and Africa. What Britain and France—but above all Britain, which originally took the lead in the drive against Nasser—have done is to react in a manner likely to obtain for him just the degree of African nationalist support that he needs.

It is Egypt which has so far won the

war of nerves; and the Egypt we have to deal with is ruled by a dictator who has made it plain what his further aims are. The *London Times* (August 15), which usually tends to wrap political issues in legal cotton-wool, for once refrained from calling a spade an agricultural implement:

Britain and the West, in taking a stand on the canal issue, have taken a risk. If the situation is mishandled, Arab nationalism may sweep through the oilfields of the Middle East and for some time deprive us of our sources of supply. But the risk, had we stood by idle, would have been greater and might well have become a certainty. The memory of Abadan, the Lebanon's threat to the I.P.C. pipeline, the repudiation of the Indonesian debt, Dr. Azikiwe's remarks on English banking in eastern Nigeria—all these are warnings that the consequences of Nasser's action going unchallenged would be the progressive elimination of European stakes, and European contribution to development, in the emergent countries. . . .

Simple, legitimate interests, and the rule of law, are at stake. They have to be asserted. There is an immense tide of emotional nationalism now in flood. It should be respected, but not feared. The emergent peoples are not fools. . . . They are capable of recognizing when others act of necessity. . . .

This is well enough in its way, but the "tough" line cannot be followed while the U.S. and the USSR cancel each other out, thereby allowing Asian and Arab nationalism to overrun all the old political landmarks. It is this world stalemate that has enabled the Egyptian dictator to blackmail the Western nations. It is the same stalemate that will make it possible for him, with the Suez Canal revenues in his pocket, to turn his attention to Iraq, the only remaining "stable" Arab country and the chief pillar of the Baghdad Pact. One must indeed be blind not to see that the pact is next on his list of victims—there are enough nationalist conspirators in Baghdad to launch the necessary cascade of army coups and assassinations, though whether in the end a country which borders on Turkey can hope to keep the Mosul oil fields if it falls into anarchy is another question. However that may be, this particular avalanche is now well and

truly under way, and the only question is whether it can be checked before war has been added to the long list of calamities from which the Middle East is suffering.

II

SO FAR as British opinion is concerned— and it should be borne in mind that from the start the British government has been the pace-setter of Western reaction to Nasser's coup—there are two, and only two, coherent attitudes visible: a conviction that Nasser is the West's enemy number one, who must be overthrown at all costs; and an equally stubborn belief that since he cannot be overthrown without a disastrous struggle, he must be appeased at all costs. It now looks as though these diverging lines of thought correspond to the division between government and opposition, or between Conservative and Liberal-Labor opinion. In reality the issue cuts across party lines, for there are many Conservatives who hesitate to go all the way with the advocates of firmness, just as there are some Liberals and Socialists who do not share the pacifist sentimentality of the left. More important, government and opposition are at bottom united both in dislike of Nasser and in unwillingness to use force, except under extreme provocation, e.g. closure of the Canal to ships belonging to the "Users' Association." And even on this point there is now (in mid-September) considerable uncertainty.

What the current split in British public opinion really amounts to is a profound divergence on the future prospects of Western policy and enterprise in the Middle East. If one believes (as do most Labor supporters and the Liberal public represented by journals like the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Observer*, not to mention the *New Statesman and Nation*, whose reaction was predictable) that the West stands to lose everything unless it swims with the nationalist tide, it is quite a plausible argument that we had better prepare ourselves for the forthcoming nationalization (i.e. expropriation) of all Western oil holdings in the Middle East, to be followed by some kind of bargain

with the new owners. In the eyes of those holding this view, loyalty to international law precludes all thought of sanctions against Egypt; this is the common bond holding together the rather motley opposition to the British government's half-hearted talk of using force. It is an opposition which can count on a confused mass of leftwing public opinion, traditionally suspicious of what it regards as Tory bellicosity, though recently rather angry with Egypt and not averse to having Nasser "taught a lesson." But its hard core is made up of the characteristically liberal synthesis of legalism and internationalism: nothing is to be done save through the United Nations, and if the United Nations is paralyzed by the veto and the Arab-Asian bloc, this merely goes to show that it is folly to talk of acting against the solid mass of Eastern opinion. In any case, military action is ruled out as being likely to set the Arab world on fire.

It is a perfectly consistent, dignified, and civilized reaction to what has happened, and one's only marvel is that those who take this line are so sure not merely of their virtue but of their superior ability to measure the future. The fact is that each party to this debate, as so often happens, has got hold of one end of the stick and refuses to let go. If it is true that the original Anglo-French reaction was futile (especially since it culminated in an invitation to a conference, instead of a prompt military ultimatum and action following within forty-eight hours), it is no less true that the now fashionable Liberal-Socialist prescription will merely whet Nasser's growing appetite. To say this, however, is not necessarily to differ from those who hold that the use of force against Egypt would be madness under present circumstances. It is merely to point out that the Western powers are in a dilemma and cannot afford to indulge in illusions about their ability to control the march of events in the Middle East. Their position has been fatally undermined by Egypt's virulence and by irresponsible Arab nationalism. It is mere common sense to recognize this and to get ready for worse shocks.

HERE, unfortunately, one is compelled to part company with the proponents of "reasonableness." It is their smugness that is so alarming. The former Labor M.P. who wrote to the *Times*: "... we know that the United Nations will be no more effective than was the League of Nations. We shall deserve the catastrophe we shall certainly incur if we do not shoulder our proper responsibilities," caused alarm and anger on the left. Fancy talking like that, when all right-thinking people ought to know that (to quote another letter-writer, this time an eminent Liberal) the Charter "... means that military force must not be used on the territory of a foreign power, except in defense against armed aggression (which has not taken place) or at the behest of the Security Council." For some reason the people who take this line invariably overlook the fact that Egypt has for years proclaimed herself at war with Israel, and thereby laid herself open to being disciplined by the Security Council—except, of course, that the Security Council has no such intention (or power, in view of the veto).

It is the old story of pacifism masquerading as sturdy defense of international law. The blank horror on the left when Gaitskell, in his first unpremeditated reaction to the Suez coup, spoke of a struggle for control of the Middle East, was instructive to watch: such language from the leader of the opposition! Truly, democracy and a rational foreign policy do not go easily together.

By now, of course, this particular issue is dead. Mr. Gaitskell has heard from the party managers and obediently come round to the orthodox Labor position, according to which the chief threat to world peace is Tory bellicosity. This kind of thing makes fine election stuff, but does not help one to understand what is going on in the world. The internationalist argument is a little more respectable, though weakened by failure to take account of power politics in the Asian world: one would never guess from the *New Statesman's* tributes to Mr. Nehru and Mr. Krishna Menon that India's attitude has throughout been determined by her own

tactical considerations, e.g. hostility to Pakistan and unwillingness to let Russia pose as the sole champion of anti-colonialism.

Lastly, there are the "realists" who assert that Britain and France blundered badly during the first fortnight of the conflict, and were saved from the consequences of their own folly by the discovery that Asian opinion was against them. This is true, but it is the kind of negative judgment that does not tell one much about the proper attitude to be pursued on the next occasion. The fact is that London and Paris were panicked by the discovery that their assets in the Middle East could be confiscated with impunity, while Russia and America stood watching each other and canceling each other out. Behind this débâcle there loomed the even more alarming prospect of another Yalta, i.e., a tacit Soviet-American agreement to partition North Africa and the Middle East, at the expense of the "old colonial powers." It was to lay this ghost that Mr. Dulles appeared in person at the London conference. For the moment the ghost has ceased to clank its chains in Whitehall, though the French have apparently not yet buried their belief that the whole Suez operation was mounted with the tacit assistance of U.S. Ambassador Henry Byroade, and that the final upshot will be an American-Egyptian consortium to run the Canal and divert the profits to Egypt (see *Le Monde* for August 25). These doubtless unworthy suspicions are only mentioned here to indicate how little the Western nations trust each other, and how far they have to go if they wish to present a united front to the Moscow-Cairo axis.

PERHAPS the only consolation to be derived from the Western diplomacy of the past few months is that it has at least broken up the Bandung camp: instead of standing closer together as a result of the recent upheaval, Russia and India have visibly pulled apart, while on her other flank India has momentarily lost touch with Pakistan, Turkey, and Persia—in short, with the predominantly Moslem countries which are not

Arab and have no illusions about Colonel Nasser. This at any rate is something; in the context of Asian and Middle Eastern politics it is quite a substantial achievement, and even in terms of global alignments it is not to be sneezed at. But it does not quite compensate for the impending loss of Western control over Suez, the further undermining of Western influence in the Arab world, and the USSR's growing prestige among the more bellicose and fanatical Arab chauvinists. Mr. Shepilov may not have emerged with brilliant honors from the London conference—seen at close quarters he seems a fairly typical specimen of the Khrushchev era of pompous mediocrity—but though towards the end he had maneuvered himself into something approaching isolation among his colleagues, he managed to retain his hold over the Egyptians. Making Colonel Nasser relinquish the Russian bear's precious support is going to be a difficult operation and, even if successful, may turn out to cost more money than the U.S. originally offered to finance the Aswan dam. The attempt would nonetheless be worth making if Nasser had not already shown himself in his true colors.

It will of course be made anyhow, whatever the reluctance of London and Paris to sanction Mr. Dulles's diplomacy. Britain and France are not in control of the situation; from the outset of the crisis they never were. Their only hope now is that both the United States and the Asian world will become disillusioned with Colonel Nasser before he sets fire to what remains of their earthly possessions. It is a slim hope. The chances are that Nasser will continue to march towards the goal of reviving the "Arab empire" of his schoolboy imagination, with Turkey, Persia, Ethiopia, Pakistan, India, and Indonesia gradually cooling towards him, but not quite fast enough to give him pause. In the interval there is scope enough for the partial fulfilment of his military dreams. Should he come a cropper over Israel or some other obstacle, there are of course rival aspirants for power, able and willing to continue where he left off. At worst, as Mr. Khrushchev pointed out to the

British and French ambassadors in Moscow last August, the Arab states, if checked in warfare, can count on Soviet "volunteers" to bail them out. It is not a pretty prospect.

III

NOTHING has so far been said of the ostensible target of Colonel Nasser's Canal seizure: the revenues of the Suez Company. This is not because the matter is unimportant, but because it is tangential to the real issue, which is political control of the world's most important waterway (physical control of course is indisputably Egyptian—what is at stake is the character of the regime to whom it is proposed to entrust the Canal administration, not the question whose soldiers are to line the Nile banks). Given the likelihood that in the end a compromise will enable Egypt to buy the Company off and pocket a larger share of the Canal revenues, it becomes the more important to take the operational control out of the hands of an aggressive, self-centered dictatorship.

In principle this could be done by internationalizing the Canal completely, i.e. by instituting an extra-territorial regime over a strip of land running along its banks and placing the whole administration under joint international control. This is the solution which Egypt fears most, which Russia and India (for different reasons) are determined to block, and which the West ought to demand, since it is the only real guarantee against interference with shipping. The Western powers, of course, have no intention of pressing for such a solution—or to be exact, the United States has no such intention—and in consequence Britain and France can do nothing about it, though they would like to impose some such scheme on Egypt if Nasser can be forced out.

It is likewise evident that on this issue Egypt can count on more or less reluctant support from those Moslem nations which have given their shaky allegiance to the Dulles formula. Whatever their qualms about Nasser, they are not yet ready to subscribe to the thesis that Egypt is incompetent to manage the Canal, and most of them

have politely ignored Sir Anthony Eden's plaintive evocation of the fascist specter. Experience may gradually convert them to tacit acceptance of the view that Suez is too important to the world, including Asia, to be made the plaything of Egyptian chauvinists, but the moment to press this claim has not yet come. When it arrives, it will be interesting to see whether U.S. concern over Panama will interfere with an opportunity to assert the interests of the world community.

In the meantime there is little to be gained from measuring the immediate risks of a stoppage of oil to Europe against the probability that Egyptian administrators and technicians will in the end prove as incompetent as Dr. Mossadegh's helpers did in Persia five years ago. The case against an Anglo-French policy of tough economic sanctions is not that it will encourage the Egyptian dictatorship to throttle the Canal, but that in the end it will prove self-defeating. Egypt can probably operate the Canal, however inefficiently, without the Western pilots who have been withdrawn. Other Western pilots, as well as contingents of Russian, Polish, and Yugoslav pilots, are now there for training. If Britain and France turn on the pressure, while the U.S. stands aside and the smaller maritime nations refuse to align themselves with a policy of sanctions, the most likely outcome is another diplomatic fiasco. For this reason the most clear-headed observers have come to advocate a policy of firmness which falls just short of giving Egypt an excuse for applying counter-measures against Anglo-French shipping. Such a policy involves a certain minimum degree of economic pressure until Colonel Nasser has signified his readiness to discuss the Dulles formula for international control, as against the Indian-Russian proposal to offer Egypt a new treaty giving other countries merely the right to "advise" on management problems.

This is clearly the line which Britain and France have decided to follow, and for which they are trying to secure American support on the one hand, and Asian acquiescence on the other. It is relatively promising, since, after all, the potential members of

the "Users' Association" represent the overwhelming bulk of the shipping that passes through the Canal. If this majority holds together (already it shows signs of strain), it might in the end compel Egypt to accept an arrangement giving non-Egyptian interests effective control of the future Canal management board. Yet even in this case the major problem will remain unsolved as long as the present regime continues in power, for no international board can hope to maintain physical control of the Canal so as to insure free and non-discriminatory access to all the world's shipping.

If one rules out as impractical the elimination of Egyptian sovereignty from the strip of land through which the Canal runs, one is left with the conclusion that the Egyptian authorities on the spot must be placed in a frame of mind suitable to their responsibilities. They must, in other words, stop being chauvinists and learn to treat the Canal not as Egypt's plaything but as a genuinely international waterway from which Egypt may reasonably try to extract financial profit, but which must be lifted clean out of the area of power politics and made available to the ships of all nations, no matter what flag they fly, and whether or not their governments are on good terms with Egypt or the other Arab countries.

THIS is the essence of the Dulles formula. That such an attitude will in fact be displayed by the present Egyptian regime, or by any successor likely to emerge in the near future, is so improbable that one must marvel at the optimism of those who maintain that the London conference has laid the groundwork for an acceptable compromise. It is in fact far more likely that in the end Cairo will commit itself to nothing more than a form of international supervision leaving effective control in Egyptian hands, and that this control will operate so as to give Colonel Nasser the permanent blackmailing power which he requires for his wider plans. Such an outcome can easily be concealed by a formula that looks reasonably good on paper, at least to people who are

willing to trust Colonel Nasser's intentions. To others it will signify a decorously veiled triumph for Egyptian chauvinism.

On paper, the Egyptian bargaining position does not look very strong. Some 95 per cent of the shipping passing through the Canal belongs to the seventeen nations who support the amended Dulles formula. Egypt herself and the four dissident powers—Russia, India, Indonesia, and Ceylon—own between them only one and a half per cent of the total tonnage. The demand for international control has therefore the practically unanimous support of the Canal's users. Moreover, since the imposition of a partial Anglo-French financial blockade, less than half of the Canal dues are being paid to the new Egyptian authority. Colonel Nasser must therefore negotiate, in some form or other, if he is to obtain more of the Canal revenues; his only alternative is to close the Canal to ships which do not pay dues to his own authority. This would be in clear contravention of international law, and would in fact constitute the sort of action that Anglo-French military measures have been designed to discourage.

It is of course an open question whether—if matters ever came to the point—Britain and France would live up to their public utterances. Many Egyptians evidently think they will not, and Mr. Shepilov has already warned them of the wrath to come if they do. By the time these words appear in print, we may be in a better position to judge whether Anglo-French nerves have been toughened by the experience of the 30's. The best guess at the moment would seem to be that while mental awareness has been sharpened by the lessons of the Hitler-Mussolini period, there has been no corresponding improvement of moral fiber. Certainly the disregard of Israel's rights for the past seven years, until it became convenient to revive the issue, argues no great advance beyond the political standards of the Chamberlain epoch.

Assuming, however, that the Western alliance proves both tougher and more resolute than we have a right to expect, the question

arises what the European nations are to do in the interval until the whole of Asia, from Turkey to Japan, comes round to the reluctant conclusion that Colonel Nasser cannot be trusted to run the Canal. The Egyptian economy is not indeed in a position to stand great strains; if the Western nations boycotted the Canal for a while, the inconvenience they would thereby impose on themselves (mainly in the form of bigger European dollar purchases in Western hemisphere oil markets) would be small compared to the effect such action would have on Egypt. Colonel Nasser would then have to decide whether to go the whole hog and become a Soviet satellite pure and simple. It is possible that he may shrink from this unattractive fate and take refuge in Indian mediation and a compromise formula; it is of course likewise conceivable that he may drag Egypt over the brink. Such a test of nerves, however disagreeable, may in the end seem preferable (even in the eyes of Western diplomats) to a policy of giving him what he wants.

A COMPROMISE over the running of the Canal would not, however, eliminate the need to reduce Europe's dependence on Middle Eastern oil, and especially on its transport through the Suez Canal. The current crisis has thrown this dependence into urgent relief and thereby probably hastened the adoption of long-term measures designed to spread the political risks. These are now concentrated in the two major transit countries—Egypt with its Canal, and Syria with its pipelines. To build another pipeline through Syria, in order to reduce Europe's dependence on the Canal, would be an act of folly. To make use of Israel as a transit country would probably sharpen Arab political antagonism, and although it would do the Western powers no harm to show a little backbone in their conduct toward the Arabs, it must be recognized that they cannot thereby solve the major transport problem. The best plan probably is to build enough super-tankers to be able to carry the bulk of the oil from the Persian Gulf to Europe

round the Cape of Good Hope. Since Iran and Kuwait—the two relatively stable areas—produce about half the total supply of Middle Eastern oil, this would have the additional advantage of integrating production and transport more closely with political planning. In the long run this seems the most likely outcome of the present challenge to European reliance on the Suez Canal. It is in fact not impossible that by gambling for such high stakes Colonel Nasser will in the end turn out to have given both the maritime nations and the European oil consumers the necessary incentive for making themselves independent of the permanent blackmail he clearly hopes to levy on them.

Such an outcome would also provide a relatively satisfactory answer to those who criticize the British government's unconditional withdrawal from the Suez Zone in 1954. This decision was in fact a gamble which is now seen to have disappointed its promoters. It formed part of a deliberate attempt to secure the friendship of Colonel Nasser, then still operating under General Naguib's presidency. More generally, it was a continuation of Britain's post-1914 policy of working with the current of Arab nationalism. The failure of this policy is now admitted by all save a handful of ideologists and Arabophile specialists with a stake in desert mirages; in particular, it is tacitly acknowledged by the oil interests and the industries that depend on them. One can now read in the *London Financial Times* an admission that political uncertainties generated by excessive dependence on Suez "were one of the reasons why the transfer to [oil-burning] diesels on British railways was delayed ten years longer than it should have been." In the end, no amount of vested ideological interest in Arabophile fantasies can stand up to the silent pressure of such considerations. Western Europe needs secure access to the Middle Eastern oil reserves, although in a crisis they could be dispensed with long enough to bring any Arab government tumbling down. To gain the necessary conditions for long-range economic planning, the British and European governments will, finally,

be driven to reduce both their political investment in Arab good will and their technical dependence on the Suez bottleneck. Both processes have probably been set in train already by Egypt's dictator, though the results may be somewhat slow in coming. If this forecast proves accurate, Colonel Nasser will go down as the man who forced the Western nations to make themselves less dependent on Arab potentates.

SINCE the predictable failure of the Menzies mission to Cairo, these long-range issues have begun to look a good deal less academic. It is obvious now that if the Western powers want to bring Colonel Nasser to his senses (or to eliminate him by slow strangulation, as was done in the case of Dr. Mossadegh), their only recourse is to economic sanctions—leaving aside the doubtful utility of the appeal to the Security Council, which in any case can only produce some extra moral-political pressure, and may in the end produce nothing at all. Such sanctions (for which Washington appears to show less enthusiasm than London and Paris) must involve at least three distinct steps: the partial or total re-routing of Western shipping round the Cape, in order to deny Colonel Nasser the revenue he wants; acceptance of American aid to help Western Europe finance dollar purchases of oil in the Western hemisphere, which would replace some of the regular flow from the Middle East while the reorganization of transport is in progress; and American cooperation in building, as rapidly as possible, a fleet of long-distance oil tankers capable of taking oil round the Cape at an economic cost.

How far the U. S. administration can be expected to go along with such policies is now a matter for some speculation. On the one hand, most American officials seem a good deal less "hard" on the subject of Colonel Nasser than the British and French, who have had more direct experience of his methods. On the other, election-year nervousness over the possibility that Britain and France may take the military bit between their teeth should induce the Americans to

support economic sanctions. It is recalled in London that in the Persian case Washington came round to the European view that Mossadegh was not a reliable partner. The difference of course is that he had no organized mass movement behind him. But the fact that Nasser is more dangerous merely makes it more urgent, in the Anglo-French view, to get rid of him.

The alternative to such a policy is to angle for Indian or Pakistani "mediation" to produce a compromise acceptable to Egypt. What this would in fact imply has already been made clear by Colonel Nasser: he is prepared to accept his own maximum terms, if they are served up to him by India or Pakistan in the guise of a formula dressed up to look like a compromise between his original demands and the London conference plan. This kind of thing may have an appeal to politicians, in and out of office, whose chief concern is to avoid trouble. It has no meaning in the real context of the Suez dispute. Ultimately, whatever the Bandung powers may be able to do for Egypt at the United Nations, they will have to face the fact that the Western nations are unwilling to entrust their economic safety to the Egyptian dictator. If the Bandung powers insist on backing him to the end, they will hasten his economic isolation from European countries. In other words, they will help make the Suez Canal worthless.

This outcome is clearly foreshadowed by the differing European and Asian reactions to the failure of the Menzies mission. Regrettable though this is, it is preferable to war on the one hand, and capitulation on the other. Either would be a disaster. An economic boycott which persuades the Egyptians that even a nationalist regime cannot with impunity trample on the rights of other nations, seems the best cure for the present state of mind. A strategy of this kind demands good nerves and a relative absence of sentimentality, whether of the Tory-imperialist or the Liberal-pacifist kind. At the time of writing some of the political preconditions of such an attitude may be beginning to emerge.